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McMurtrie, Douglas  
Crawford

Home teaching for shut in  
crippled children

[New York]

c1919

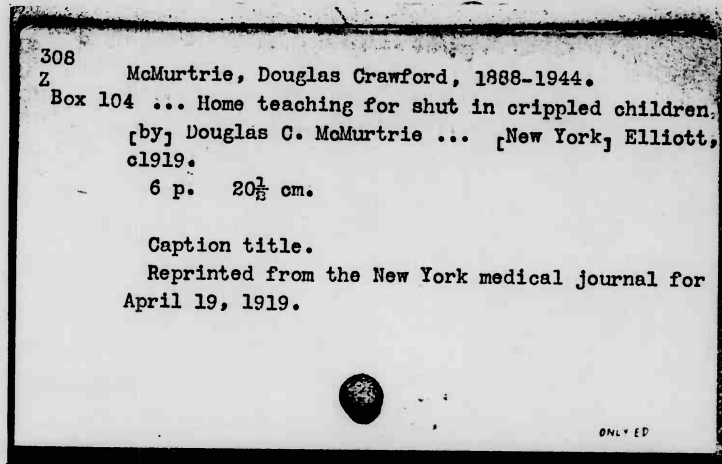
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## HOME TEACHING FOR SHUT IN CRIPPLED CHILDREN.

DOUGLAS C. MCMURTRIE,  
New York,

President, Federation of Association for Cripples; Director, Red  
Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men.

Through the establishment of special classes in the public schools, instruction has been provided for thousands of crippled children, not too seriously handicapped, who were able to get to the classes by the aid of transportation in both directions. The first provision of this character by public educational authorities was made in London in 1899 by the education committee of the London County Council. This public action followed the establishment through private initiative of day classes for crippled children at the Passmore Edwards Settlement. There are now under instruction in special classes for the physically defective, in the larger cities of Great Britain, a total of 30,695 children. The national educational authorities extend to the local boards a grant to meet part of the expense of providing these facilities for the crippled school children.

The first city in the United States to provide special classes for crippled children was New York. Here, too, the work had been started on private initiative in the Avenue B school building of the Children's Aid Society, by an auxiliary of the Guild for Crippled Children, an organization no longer in existence. The particular auxiliary referred to, however, became the Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, which did an extensive work in promoting day class instruction of physically handicapped children. The work under private auspices began in 1899. The efforts of the

association were directed constantly toward persuading the Board of Education to make special classes for crippled children a feature of the public school system.

This aim was accomplished in 1907, the Board of Education opened its first class for cripples in public school No. 67. At first the board operated the classes and the association provided transportation between the homes of the children and the schools, but later this item of service also was taken over by the school authorities. There are now in operation in the various boroughs of the city sixty-eight public school special classes for crippled children, providing for the instruction of 1,162 physically handicapped pupils who would otherwise be denied such complete opportunity for training. In addition, the board has established twelve hospital classes in which 237 children receive instruction. Since the start in New York, special classes for crippled children have been established in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Grand Rapids.

It was at first thought that these special classes would meet all the educational needs of crippled children, not in institutions. In fact, a pioneer work carried on in New York City by an auxiliary of the Ethical Culture Society, providing visiting teachers for crippled children, was discontinued, in the belief that its service was no longer required. Two years ago, however, the Federation of Associations for Cripples, a cooperative league of all the agencies in the city working in the interests of the crippled, began to have reported to it, largely through the department of physical training of the Board of Education, crippled children too gravely handicapped to permit their attendance in the special classes. The membership of this federation is made up of the following organizations: Association for the Aid of Crippled Children; Association of Public School Teachers of Crippled Children of the City of New York; Blythedale Home for Con-

valescent Tuberculous Crippled Children; Brearley League Industrial Classes for Cripples; Brooklyn Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor; Brooklyn Bureau of Charities; Brooklyn Home for Blind, Crippled, and Defective Children; Children's Aid Society; Crippled Children's Driving Fund; Crippled Children's East Side Free School; Harlem Day Home and School for Crippled Children; Hospital for Deformities and Joint Diseases; New York State Branch of the Shut In Society; William H. Davis Free Industrial School; Ladies' Auxiliary of the Orthopedic Ward of the Post Graduate Hospital; New York Philanthropic League in Aid of Crippled Children, and the Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men. It was evident that the children needed some one to visit them in their homes to give them instruction, to provide some simple form of occupation, and to bring them into some slight touch with the outside world. The secretary of the federation began rendering this visiting service to the first children registered, in the course of her regular duties. But as the number of children grew the task became too extensive. There was undertaken in consequence, the organization of a corps of volunteers—mostly women, although there were some men—who agreed each to visit one child twice a week, an hour at a time. These workers received their assignments from the office of the federation and made regular reports of visits and of the progress being made by their pupils. The visitor also reported any special need on the part of the child or the family, and this was taken up and attended to by the federation's executive secretary.

While the work of these volunteers was most satisfactory, there were some cases which could not properly be assigned to such a visitor. The effort was always made to assign to a volunteer teacher a child within reasonable distance from the former's home. Some children lived in districts accessible to none of the volunteers. Other children presented

difficulties with which it was not thought wise to saddle a volunteer.

Still others lived in neighborhoods of questionable character to which it was not thought expedient to send the young women who made up the majority of the corps. It became clear that there was necessary some professional service to supplement the volunteer work. The federation therefore retained a paid visiting teacher who handled cases not assignable to volunteers. In addition to the full time work, the strength of the volunteer organization averaged thirty-five in number.

Many of the visiting teachers became greatly attached to the children under their care, and in many cases the results obtained constituted just cause for gratification. An interesting example that came to the attention of a volunteer teacher was that of a tuberculous spine case. Mary was nine years old and had never learned to read or write. The teacher became so interested in her little charge that she went to visit her three times a week instead of two. Even during the summer holidays the teacher kept up her instruction once a week and took the little girl out frequently. In the autumn the child sent her teacher a printed letter asking her to come back. The volunteer began the work again but was taken ill and could not continue to teach. She visits her former pupil, however, from time to time, and whenever there is any trouble at her home, Mary writes to her teacher to come and help straighten things out. The teacher has thus become the family advisor.

The full time teacher also had many cases of interest. One especially may be cited. It was the case of a child referred to as defective. She could not remember anything and was lacking in power of concentration, etc. The teacher cleverly began by showing the little girl how to play with dolls. Then as part of the game, the teacher began to teach the dolls how to read, speaking to them and explaining things to them as though they were

human. The effect upon the little girl was extraordinary. She quickly lost interest in the dolls and evinced a desire to be taught herself. She made wonderful progress and had attained the grade of second year work when the teaching season was over. Now she is good in all her studies although a little slow in arithmetic.

The rule of the Federation of Associations for Cripples has always been that, while private initiative should lead, any real need of the community should be assumed as public responsibility, and be met at public expense. For this reason the federation at every opportunity, urged on the Board of Education the incorporation of home teaching for crippled children as a regular feature of the public education system. It was a cause of gratification accordingly when the Board of Education acknowledged the responsibility and made appropriation to meet it. This move, and the considerations on which it was based, is described in a report by Associate Superintendent Andrew W. Edson to the board of superintendents. The report was transmitted by William L. Ettinger, chairman of the board of superintendents, with recommendation for favorable action, to the Board of Education. The recommendation was approved by the board on December 30, 1918. The text of the Edson report follows:

"For the past few years, the Federation of Associations for Cripples, 311 Fourth Avenue, Manhattan, in cooperation with Miss Adela J. Smith, assistant director of physical training, has provided volunteer teachers for the education and training of the helpless. For the past year, however, the number of volunteer teachers was greatly lessened through Red Cross and other war activities demanding the attention of all who had time to give to philanthropic work.

"At the present time, there are in this city, more than 125 children of school age, with normal minds, who desire an education, but whose physical condi-

tion is such that it is impracticable to transport them to school. Besides this number, there are 270 helpless cripples, as a result of the recent poliomyelitis epidemic—thirty-five of school age, twenty-nine of kindergarten age, 206 five years of age, or younger. As a consequence, the number requiring home care will increase from year to year. The only way by which these children can receive the elements of a common school education is through the efforts of teachers who will visit these children at their homes.

"During the past year, ninety-two helpless crippled children received instruction in academic and industrial work, two lessons per week, for longer or shorter periods, at the convenience of the visiting teachers. These teachers were regular grade teachers, retired teachers, and volunteer workers in other lines of activity. Reports of the work were submitted to the federation.

"One of the objections to volunteer service is the inability to obtain continuous systematic work. During the past term, the service was irregular, and, in many instances, entirely dropped, in part due to the urgent call for some form of war activity. As a consequence, many of the children suffered in their progress and lost interest in their work, and the parents became discouraged.

"It is clearly evident that the time has come when the instruction of helpless cripples should be carried on by the Board of Education, and that teachers be employed for this purpose. These children should be provided with instruction in elementary school subjects and in industrial work. These teachers may be. 1. Regular visiting teachers employed for the purpose; 2. Regular grade teachers assigned for after school service; 3. Substitute teachers.

"In my opinion, this instruction should be given three days per week, one and a half hours a day. A teacher employed for full time could care for eight children. The expense involved by the three

plans proposed, estimating the number of helpless crippled children to be educated at 160, would be approximately as follows:

- "1. The employment of twenty visiting teachers at \$1,000 each.....\$20,000
- "2. The employment of grade teachers from nearby schools, three visits a week, at \$2.50 a day.....\$48,000
- "3. The employment of twenty substitute teachers, at \$3.75 a day (including car fare).....\$15,000

"It goes without saying that the work would be better done by paid workers who would be depended upon to be prompt and regular in their attendance and to give systematic and continuous instruction. In order to systematize the work, the following plan of procedure is recommended:

- "1. A canvass to be made for all cases of helpless crippled children of school age. These cases shall be reported to the Department of Physical Training.
2. Twenty substitute teachers to be employed to give instruction in the elementary school subjects and in industrial work at \$3.75 a day.
3. These teachers to receive technical training in the hygienic care and methods of instruction of crippled children through the Department of Education in preparation for this special work.
4. Books and supplies to be provided from the nearby schools, when requested by the visiting teachers and indorsed by the district superintendent in charge of the schools.
5. A record of the condition of each child receiving instruction, the work carried on, and the progress made to be recorded at the middle and close of each month, and a copy of the same forwarded to the Department of Physical Training.
6. The co-operation of the Federation of Associations for Cripples to be continued in order that volunteer service may be continued wherever it is deemed advisable.

"During the period of its service, 1917 to 1919, the federation provided home instruction to 231 children."



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